

## [Taxi Strike]

This story turned in by Herman Portnow Herman Spector Covering Transport - No forms filled out. 11 TAXI STRIKE

I: FAR FROM HUMAN HABITATION

It don't bother me. Ya see me waitin for a call? I'm always waitin. Business is lousy anyhow. Owner, driver, hackie, cabbie: it all registers the same thing. If it's good with the next guy it's good with me. Ya think I blame those guys? They take plenty of abuse. It's a dog's life. The man walking on the street thinks if a hackie asks for 45 percent, it's a lot. Figure it up, what does it amount to? A dollar a week, maybe. Let them take it. I say, they're entitled to it.

I got my own worries. Plates, license, repair bills: it eats up dough. I play the line here, it's a quiet section, business people, they all know me, it's a steady clientele. The longer you're in it the poorer you get. Take me; started three years ago I had three thousand dollars. No I got nothin. But I'm still hopin, and I'm still in it. It's my office; I eat here, I sleep here, I see the same faces . . .

People are scared to ride now. The headlines was a bit too sharp. Coupla minutes ago I got a call. The man says, you think we'll be stoned if we go uptown? I says lissen mister, it's alright with me. What can I tell him? He walks away. Don't get me wrong, I got nothin against the boys. But I think they'll make a failure ottov it.

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Ya think it's so good for me on the night shift? Weak eyes. The Doc keeps tellin me: Mister Schoenfeld, ye gotta quit, it ain't doin your eyes no good. Seventeen years I'm drivin at night. So look at me, does it look like I can quit? Ya gotta live, so I'm still here, far from

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human habitation, I don't know what's goin on in other places, I don't care; I got my own troubles . . .

### 2: UNION MAN

We're one of the worst people in the world, exploited I mean. Percentage ain't our main demand at all, don't get that into your head. What we want is recognition, so the union can actually run things for our benefit. We been kicked aroun quite a bit ya know, we ain't lettin on-one kid us. It's human nature: when the Company got control they run things for themselves, you can understand it. That's the way it works out. If we can squeeze a few bucks outta the bosses an get some security, that's the only goddam thing we can do. We wann a little more dough an we wanna work every day, thass all.

Tell ya how it is in this racket: a hackman works 12 hours a day on an average; that's not unusual at all, it's not over-estimated one bit. When he got an income of four dollars, that's considered kinda high. The worst part - as far as I can see it - is conditions. The hackie goes down to the garage, an he don't even know if he'll get work. He's kinda guessin, that's right, that's the method, keepin him guessin alla time. Then there's crazy competition on the street, he gotta get calls, so he keeps gone at a maddening pace, an what happens?

### 3

They crash their cabs, these hackies, they steal calls, they go in for this double-parkin business, they turn in the middle of the street. I don't say it's right but what can they do? The fleet-owners keep drivin and drivin, so a man who wants to get a cab sort of tries to beat his next fellow-man ottov a call. It's human nature, ain't it?

On account of low bookins they gotta way of keepin a man off a cab. It's stupid when you come to think of it, you can see it's stupid, because look, there's a certain amount of people ridin cabs; the rest can't afford it no matter what ya say. So it's a matter of luck; like you're in a certain spot and you grab a call comin ottov a building, an I don't. Is it my fault?

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It's a matter of luck, or chance, or whatever you wanna call it. Commonsense tells ya, when the Company takes an average of bookins, halfa the men are above the average, an halfa them below. So if everybody below don't get on a cab, what does that leave? It's simple arithmetic.

The main point is we're livin in a day when things are supposed to be better for the workinman, there's even such a thing as legislation, they're trying ta lift men up from the bottom if ya know what I mean, and here's thousands and thousands of guys - family men, workin 12 and 14 hours a day in the biggest city in the world. Hell, we're not playing for marbles; we're fightin with men's bellies here!

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It's unbelievable when ya come ta think of it. There's men over 40 and 50, mosta them; they don't know nothin else but hackin. Many of these guys never even see their families. Kids growin up without a father: what kind of family life is that? What kind of upbringing is it for a kid? Even farmers, they're exploited, they're worse off than us in some ways, at least they're in with their families, it's more human if ya get what I mean. Some a these hackies work so goddam hard their minds get dull, they can't think of anything different, they just keep sinkin and sinkin. You know what they say: there's worms in apples and worms in radishes. Take the worm in a radish, he thinks the whole world is radishes. . .

My personal reaction is, we're out for what's reasonable and we're gonna win. It don't make so much difference ta me, as far as what I stand to gain for myself if an idea is good, it's good. I've been in and outta this business an I figure, if the union is organized the way it should be, I'll be out. Part-timers like me will evenchally be eliminated, that's to be expected. No, I don't belong ta no party. I still got my card in the Democratic party, but it's got nothin ta do with politics here. Any party that's willin ta help, if it's communist, socialist, anarchist, we don't care, if it benefits us we don't ask no questions. Sure, the papers talk about reds. But it's meaningless, it don't mean anything, it don't require any attention. Anybody who wantsa start any disruption hollers you're a communist. So what?

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Me picket? Naah, I neva picket. Ledda guys wid tree kids go out picketin. Too much like work fa me. Doan worry, I belong in dis place. Paid up ta December, wanna see my book? Ask anybody, I jus doan like ta picket, dass all. Doan care for it. I'm sorta on a 5 temporary basis. Tink I gotta be a hackie all my life? But nobody kin get me ta cross a picket line. Dat's de way I am. Ya neva hoid of it? Truckin's my racket. Soon as I save up fifty bucks fa plates I take da Ford outta cole storage. Sure, I'm no hungry Joe. I gotta liddle business. Make more in a coupla hauls dan I make here all week.

Hey, Harry, where da hell you been? I been lookin all ovah for ya. Two swell broads come ovah ta da blimp: what's about takin us to de Hotel St. George, dey asks me. I figger it up quick; it's a buck an a quarter, put it on de watch an take it out in trade. Still, wot for, wot da hell, am I gonna buy it? It's only a bounce. Stumpy, he wuz sittin on de rack an takin it all in. He grabs de two a dem an puts em right in da cab an sez "get in". Dey wuzn't bad, 28 or toity, bote.

Dere givin out checks fa night men. Stumpy got his aready. Waddeya say, we go ovah? Less get dressed up en celebrate. Ya know wot I had ta eat tday? Strawberries an cream. America I luv ya. Djeva hear a dat, strawberries in da wintertime, wiseguy? Tamorra maybe I'll be satisfied wid oleomargarine. Wot's da difference? Halfa wot ya eat keeps ya alive, de udder half kills ya. In dis racket, afta ya pay fa yer room, ya get a hunk in ya belly on a piece en de lousy eighteen-fifty is up in smoke. Ya see an uncle evvy week en a relative evvy udder week. I'm no weeper. At de same time I ain't gonna takea liekin like some a dose jerks.

I know how Pop feels about dis strike. He's got his heart en soul in it. He wantsa make a pile outta all de cabs en put a match to em. Wot's a coupla bucks extra mean ta him? He pullzin six in de mawnin, leaves de house when his kids'r in school en comes back when dere sleepin. He sees is kid Jake an hour a day. Know how e does it?

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He sez ta Jakes "Jake, when ya come home fa lunch, I'll give ya a penny." So when de kid gits home at twelve aclock he slaps de ole man right in da pud en hollers, "Pop, gimme a penny." Dat's right, I ain't kiddin. Djeva heara dis hours-wages, or wages-hours bill? Dat applies to us. Buhlieve me. Hey Harry, fa chrissakes quit beefin an less git dressed neat en go ta Nint Avenya fa some hump. Cmon: I guarantee hump.

### 4: HEADLINES

#### TAXI STRIKE BEGINS: 13,000 CALLED OUT . . .

...In issuing the strike call, the union said action became necessary because of the complete refusal of the operators to bargain with the union. The union declared it had no alternative but to exercise the strike authority voted to the executive board by the men last week. . .

. . .the Parmalee spokesman said: "Their (workers') earnings depend upon the amount of business available. It is out of the question to raise the percentage. . ."

- New York Times.

#### POLICE ON STRIKE DUTY CARRY THEIR NIGHTSTICKS. . .

- New York Times.

#### GENERAL STRIKE, Effective Jan. 3, 3 P.M. . . . .

. . .therefore the General Strike is hereby in full force and effect ... ON GUARD AGAINST PROVOCATION! Unscrupulous operators will as in the past use every means to discredit your union. . . Watch out for stool pigeons. . .LET UNITY BE YOUR MOTTO - STICK TOGETHER!. . .

- Official Taxi Bulletin No. 2

MAYOR SETTLES TAXI STRIKE . . . .

- Hearst's journal-American.

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5: SPEECH

"Brothers, there are rumors floating around to the effect that the strike is settled. This is nonsense, this is untrue, this is merely a ruse and a trick on the part of the operators which the boss-inspired newspapers are only too willing to play up. Brothers, the strike is not settled. The strike is still on. But remember, you can't win the strike in this hall. Out to the garages, everybody; get out on the picket line, stop those cars from rolling. Keep every fleet car from rolling and the strike is nine-tenths won. Out to the garages, everybody! Stop those cars. . ."

6: COP

No, we'er not expectin no trouble. That's off the record of course. We're enforcin law an order an so forth. Always perfect life on property ya know. Hell, that's our job . . .

7: WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?

I ain't backin da union if dey ain't backin me. Buck on a quarter fa dues, dat's a lotta money. Might be all right if we got two dollars a mile, heh heh. Wot kin de union do fa me? We oletimers gotta knockin around by de union before, does who dint make de bookins. Majority, eighty pissent, is ex-vetrins. Troo, de union done away widda blackball system, but if ya falls down on bookins, wot kinna union do fa ya? I'm over 40 myself and I gotta look out fa myself, nobody else is gonna do it. Aftuh ya forty it don't matta how good y are, ya can't make a job. I buhlieve inna union, sure, but I don't like de click wet's da head uv it. Dere's too much [?]. Dey can't pull any dis stuff wid me, I wasn't born yestiddy. De las tree stikes, dint da comminists serve sanwiches an wasn't dey showin pitchers of da

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Scarburra ase? No, I ain't persnly talked to anybody you'd say was a comminist, it's oney wot ya hear. My way, if dey doan like it ova here, ledden get da hell out; nobody'd miss em.

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Wot I like betta is a kinda bruddahood, like a company outfit, ya got a vacation too, en ya get sick benefits. De Wagner Law sez ya gotta have a bruddahood, dat don't mean a union. Dat's oney my persnal opinion, but ta tell de hones troot, I dunno wot de hell itte all about. Wotever way ya look at it it's tough. If ya book tree dollars ya can't make de company give ya six. Woteva way it toins out I ain't afraid, heh heh, I ain't worryin. I gotta hunka lumba here on de floor. . . . De oney trouble is, Jesus Christ, ya can't tell people ta ride inna cab. Dere's enough inna street, but no work onna street.

8: IN CASE THEY DIE.

We just put that sticker on the windshield to avoid trouble. "BROAD STREET TAXI ONNERS ASSOCIATION", that's right. We're 200 boys who own our cabs and we don't want any trouble. We're all oldtimers. We backed the curb market over sixteen years ago, it was out on the street then, maybe you don't remember. I'd like to see them win the strike, sure, why not. But we just sit quiet and listen to everything. We stick together, that's the idea of the association, to help the boys in every little way. In case one of the boys happens to die, you understand, we try to help him out. . .

9: MAJOR DEMANDS 1. HIG HER COMMISSIONS . . . 2. VACATIONS WITH PAY . . . 3. MAXIMUM JOB SECURITY . . . 4. END ALL RACIAL DISCRIMINATION . . . 5. HOURS OF WORK . . . 6. SENIORITY . . . 7. HEALTE CONDITIONS . . .

- From leaflet of Transport Workers Union.

10: A HUNNERD PISSENT SATISFIED. . .

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No, I got no kicks comin. Nuttin wotsoever. I'm a hunnerd pissent satisfied. All I got to say is leave us alone, don't bodder us. dat's all.

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Dis mawnin de wife sez: Mike, don't go out if dere's trouble. But wot trouble kin dere be? In dis outfit I'm wid, dere's a hunnerd pissent on de cabs. De Journal sez 400 went out. Dat's a hunnerd pissent lie. Dey're all a bunch a liars. Everybody ya see is a bunch a liars, de best ting is ta trust nobody. My own company union I don't trust even. De CIO? I despise de CIO. In nineteen-toity-faw I was out too. Dat was anudder phoney. Not hackdrivers, I dunno, somebody else wuz in de middle ov it, I woulden be sure a dat. CIO promised us de jobs, den everybody wuz left dumbfounded. I'm tellin ya we dint know where we wuz standin; all de doors muz auternatically locked. It was real surprizin. Dere wuz nuttin doin wotsoever. Dat's why we pushed out all de CIO men. Don't worry, if dere's any left an he's a radical we'll push him out. We don't trust nobody in dis outfit.

11: PHONEY

Lissen, lissen, don't tell nobody, I ain't a hackie ya see but let me tell you one thing: You ain't goin to get nowhere unless you dump a few a dem guys. That's my persnal idear, an I don't think there's nuthin detrimental about it. Jus hurt em in a nice way, not physically ya know, jus beat am up a little so their mothers an sisters will tell em ta watch out. Oh, I ain't suggestin it, it's jus voluntary offerings on my part. Ya know, dere's too many phonies aroun here; too many phonies fa my taste. You hackies think ya know it all, but ya don't know nothin. I'm tellin ya now, I'm tellin ya . . . anybody got de price uv a drink?. . .

12: DOWN TO THE POLLS TONIGHT!

. . . "And I want to tell you men, we're proud of the way you've conducted yourselves in this strike. There's been no violence, and there's not going to be any as far as we're concerned. The public has seen an an example of perfect discipline and control; despite



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provocation we have succeeded in keeping 80 to 85 percent of the cabs off the street, and not a man has been hurt. Now one last word. All those who have not yet voted 10 are urged to go down to the polls immediately, get down there tonight before they close, and cast your vote to put an end to rotten conditions in the taxi industry! Everybody, down to the polls tonight! Let's swing into it, men, for a new deal in the taxi industry!"

END